

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Carol C. Lam***

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***For Further Information, Contact: Assistant U. S. Attorney Carol Lee (619) 557-6235***

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***For Immediate Release***

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**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** - May 26, 2006

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced that Lucio Appleton-Lewis was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in San Diego by the Honorable John J. Houston to serve 145 months in custody and 5 years of supervised released based on Appleton-Lewis' conviction for drug trafficking. According to court documents, Lucio Appleton-Lewis pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to possess 1,950 kilograms/4,280 pounds of cocaine with intent to distribute on board a vessel. As part of his guilty plea, Appleton-Lewis admitted he was paid \$40,000 in U.S. currency to captain a go-fast vessel that was carrying 84 bales of cocaine for a total weight of 1,950 kilograms. Appleton-Lewis also admitted that he and his crew were to offload the cocaine off the coast of Mexico and then sink the go-fast vessel with a chainsaw that was found onboard.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Carol Lee, who prosecuted the case, the defendant's guilty plea arises from events that occurred on May 24, 2004. On that day the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Edisto was on patrol 80 nautical miles off the coast of Guatemala when it received a report from a Guatemalan Military

Patrol Aircraft that a “go-fast” vessel appeared to be close to the Edisto’s position. The Edisto subsequently detected the go-fast vessel on radar and discovered it was traveling directly toward it. As the Edisto traveled closer, the go-fast vessel turned around and started heading away. As the Edisto pursued the go-fast vessel, it continued to flee, opening up the distance from the Edisto at speeds up to 33 knots.

During the pursuit, Coast Guard personnel noticed the crew throwing what appeared to be white burlap bags into the ocean. A second Guatemalan aircraft arrived on the scene and notified the Edisto that it (the Guatemalan aircraft) had initiated warning shots in an attempt to stop the go-fast vessel. After a continued pursuit, the go-fast vessel stopped.

A boarding team from the Edisto boarded the go-fast vessel which was equipped with three 200 horsepower engines. Coast Guard personnel discovered one remaining burlap bag wedged between a fuel tank and rib on the vessel. The bale contained twenty brick-shaped packages of cocaine weighing approximately one kilogram each. The total weight of the cocaine in those packages was 21.84 kilograms. Another 29 bales of cocaine with a combined weight of 650 kilograms was recovered from the waters by the Guatemalan Navy.

United States Attorney Lam said, "When criminals transport tons of illegal narcotics by sea to our shores, they will be looking at lengthy prison sentences when they arrive."

This case was a product of the coordinated efforts of the San Diego Maritime Task Force comprised of the United States Coast Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

## **DEFENDANT**

Lucio Appleton-Lewis

## **SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Title 46, U.S.C., App., Sec 1903(a)(c) and (j) - Conspiracy to possess cocaine with intent to distribute a controlled substance on board a vessel. Maximum penalty per count: mandatory minimum term of 10 years to life; fine of \$4,000,000; five years of supervised release.

## **AGENCIES**

U.S. Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Immigration and Customs Enforcement